

# Post-secondary education should be more affordable

Guest Column



By Dinesh Weerakkody

THERE is a perception among some of our employers that there is a lack of skilled talent to fill positions at management levels. Often CEOs at public forums say they have difficulty filling positions in their companies.

Some of the complaints about skill shortages simply could be that employers can't get top candidates to join their companies because they do not have a solid reputation as an Employer of Choice or the wages they offer is not competitive. Then that becomes essentially an attraction problem, not a skill shortage.

A skill shortage to me would be when employers cannot find candidates at market-clearing wages. When companies cannot afford the people they want, they need to drop the idea of finding perfect candidates and look for people who could do the job with some training, on the job coaching, mentoring and on the job practice.

## Up to speed

There are plenty of ways to get staff up to speed without investing too much time and money, such as putting new employees on extended probationary periods with lower pay until they get up to speed with the requirements of the job, also on the job coaching and relying more on internal hires would help. If candidates don't have the skills the industry needs the industry, as a collective unit should make them go to a technical



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school and get the skill before they are hired. Technical colleges should be motivated to join with employer groups and business chambers and run targeted course work to fulfil the specific needs of employers. Candidates who complete the course will then qualify to be hired. They can pay for themselves or could share the cost with the employers supporting the technical school.

For instance, a bank might require that prospective job candidates first pass a basic elementary course in banking before they are hired as trainees. This strategy should not be limited for new hires only; it should be actively promoted for internal candidates for this to work however, employees must recognise that education is insurance for a better future.

## First choice

Internal candidates should often be the first choice to fill jobs higher up. Employees have organisational knowledge that no outsider would have. So they should be given priority over an external candidate. Companies should make employees ready to take on

senior jobs. Companies need to put employees with high potential on tough projects and help them learn new skills. That would over a period of time build an internal talent pipeline that can vastly expand the supply of talent that the company can tap into, making it both easier and cheaper to fill jobs within the company and group.

Apprenticeship programs can also help to build an internal pipeline of talent. This is a very popular arrangement in many professional firms. Apprentices are paid less while they are learning skills. Audit firms, law firms, motor companies and consulting firms have operated for a long time this way. A properly structured apprenticeship program, with exams, testing and certification at different stages of experience would work for most industries to create a pool of good talent to hire from.

## Way forward

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## FT Quote

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plenty. There are probably many jobs that go elsewhere because our people don't have the expertise. Therefore, post-secondary education should become more affordable so that people have the opportunity to move into fields where skills are in high demand.

Also there needs to be a wave of innovation in future education, particularly online, that will cater to this need in a more flexible, personalised way than the traditional degree courses or postgraduate courses are currently delivered.

(The writer is a senior company director.)

# National civil aviation policy

Guest Column



By Srinath Fernando

EVER since the first aircraft was conceptualised by Leonardo Da Vinci, the dream of flight is still continuously evolving. The latest aircraft is known as the dream liner Boeing 787.

There has been no end to the technological advances in aviation. The global aviation industry has since been enlarged into a multibillion dollar business and the industry has been subdivided into passenger transportation, aircraft manufacturing both civil and military, cargo operations, airport operations, space vehicles, and other aviation-related industries.

The cost of infrastructure needed to cater to aviation industry is massive and often a country like Sri Lanka would find it extremely difficult unless equity participation from commercial enterprises is tapped

The safety of passenger transportation is regulated by international laws and conventions and all airports of the world and the airlines too must comply with international safety laws/conventions in place. It has now become the responsibility of each signatory to the conventions that adequate regulatory mechanisms are in place to enforce the compliance.

In order to comply it must spend money to bring the airlines and airports in line with the safety regulations. This would entail procuring state of the art equipments and services to upgrade the systems. Given the current economic outlook it would be a massive task for Sri Lanka to invest in airport and aviation infrastructure.

## History of aviation in Sri Lanka

The history of aviation in Sri Lanka began with the British administration in Sri Lanka. The strategic position of Sri Lanka was of immense help to world airlines then in view of the distance to be covered and for other logistics and ground operations.

Air Ceylon, the first airline, was estab-

lished in 1947 with a fleet of few aircrafts and the operations ended in 1978. The Air Ceylon was shut down as it was a loss-making enterprise and it paved the way for a modern commercial airline Air Lanka Ltd. with the active cooperation from the Government of Singapore and Singapore Airlines.

Since then the national carrier Air Lanka evolved into a major airline plying different roots in the Asian and European sectors. It was a true national symbol of Sri Lanka. The airline then came under privatisation and entered into a strategic partnership with Emirates Airlines, which took a major slice of the equity.

## Need for a national aviation policy

The Government must commit itself

to continuing the growth of Sri Lanka's international air services, providing additional opportunities for trade and tourism, while maintaining a strong Sri Lanka based aviation sector. The Government should pursue an international air services policy and perhaps a white paper on aviation policy would serve to attract investors.

A white paper would enable the stakeholders to take a long-term view of potential development and growth of aviation. It would also provide a forum for discussion and consultation among all stake holders and brilliant ideas could be taken onboard and adjust the strategy at the time of execution. If there is a

holistic national approach, the aviation sector could be further improved. Even India has issued a white paper on Civil Aviation Policy.

Sri Lanka must look into the changes that would have some impact at the operations level. There should be a Joint Indo Lanka Air Services Consultation Committee so that issues relating to open skies policy between the two countries could be discussed.

## Strategy for Sri Lankan and Mihin Air

With the defeat of LTTE, thanks to the persistent efforts by the President of Sri Lanka, new opportunities have arisen to develop the tourism sector. It is high time a holistic approach to aviation is taken vis-à-vis SriLankan Airlines and Mihin Air.

The need to find a strategic partner for both airlines is opportune. The strategic partnership should be attracted by broad basing the equity. The partner should provide the necessary impetus to compete with other airlines in the



Airline operators have identified that Boeing 777 has 99% dispatch reliability and is rated as one of the most cost efficient and safest aircraft in the world

region. SriLankan Airlines should be able to exploit the Indian subcontinent with the millions of Indian NRIs (Non Resident Indians) working in the Middle Eastern region. SriLankan Airlines must also undertake a feasibility study on the Colombo-Manila sector to attract millions of Philippines nationals working in the Middle Eastern region (hub facility).

There are tremendous opportunities for budget airlines and Mihin Air should come up with its own strategy so that it no longer needs Government support for survival. Gradual easing of Mihin Air's debt burden is certainly welcome news.

SriLankan Airlines is in dire need of new aircraft. The fleet modernisation require infusion of capital and political backing would be required to obtain assistance from Boeing Capital Corporation and the US Import Export Bank, which have specialised in aircraft financing.

The airline operators have identified that Boeing 777 has 99% dispatch reliability and is rated as one of the most cost efficient and safest aircraft in the world. In the case of fleet modernisation, political risk factors might come into play as Sri Lanka's debt burden has reached humongous proportions and international lenders might have second thoughts as the GDP debt ratio is alarming. The only remedy would be to increase our exports.

There is potential for commercial utilisation of Jaffna airport to serve the Indian subcontinent. The proper civilian infrastructure should be in place to commence international operations to South India.

The Government must look into ways and means of gradually transforming the Jaffna airport into a civilian airport without compromising the national security needs of the country.

SriLankan Airlines' Aircraft Engineering Departments should be divested from the airline and made a

subsidiary with foreign participation to attract contracts from other airlines. When the Engineering Dept. is divested, it will have its mission and goals to achieve and should then be in a position to compete with other MRO (Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul) businesses worldwide. SriLankan Airlines has qualified aircraft engineers and could further augment professional levels needed to cater to other airlines.

## Skilled personnel

The aviation sector in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has seen a massive growth and airlines have invested in billions of dollars to procure new aircrafts, and airports too have undergone tremendous modernisation programs.

The Arabian Business News report says that MENA airlines are planning to add 2,400 new aircraft to operation by 2020 and this would be a windfall for Asian expatriates who are in search of greener pastures in the MENA region.

A special Boeing study says that there would be a need to recruit 36,100 pilots and 53,700 technicians over the next 20 years. Boeing projects the world would face an unprecedented demand for airline pilots and maintenance technicians to 2031 as global economies expand and airlines take delivery of thousands of new commercial airplanes.

Boeing says their customers had faced challenges in recruiting personnel due to pilot and technician shortages. This is welcome news for local aviation training schools and the Sri Lanka Air Force too should look into expanding its training opportunities to cater to commercial requirements.

(The writer is a freelance journalist and a political lobbying and government relations consultant. He has been a commercial manager of an aviation services company in the Republic of Yemen.)

My View



Marketing Dynamics

By Romanthi Fernando

# Are you overdoing your brand?

POPULAR brands are sometimes seen exhausting available resources, sometimes overusing the potential to communicate. This article argues feasible to self destructive brand management techniques

Value seen in an investment, corporate or personal, is dependent on distance that it can be carried for. This could be either time variable or dependant on share of words spoken. Largely, this distance lies in understanding the requirement in and adopting to a customer's requirement. But that in no way would mean a previous success factor could be re-done. The current context of customer interactivity, stresses the ability in being innovative.

The following methods can be used in adapting to today's customers lifestyles.

## Flexibility in channels used to communicate

Increasingly leading FMCG brands focus on strong BTL channels with one on one interactive touch points. Falling apart from purely ATL driven communications for awareness building or penetration, the use of more than one vehicle to drive objectives of awareness, increased purchase intention is seen.

This not only helps in getting their communications through innovatively but also creates a lasting top of mind recall while distributing the investment per head over a longer period of time, among a larger audience.

## Choosing the best channel

Communication is the life blood of a relationship. The same stands true with your customers. Justifiably communication is not limited to only a copy of the press ad. Unlike in the era where marketers had a few expensive ATL channels and limited BTL sources, today a potential user can be found in multiple sources. Irrespective of the fact that your product is a mass/niche, the fragmentation of media and cannels of advertising has overlapped segments.

An average individual will be exposed to more than three ATL channels on average per day. Extreme loyalty and a perfect segmentation would bring this down to two: peer influences and other uncontrollable exposures such as within the mode of public transportation. But a marketer should take extra effort in understanding the consumers mind set at the time approached, frequency, duration and importantly the tone of voice used within.

## Tone of voice

Within the years of adaptation of internet for information dissemination and control, media and brands have equally found positioning challenging. What mood would they most likely be in when they make decisions on a large investment such as a laptop or a car? Would it be while shopping? At a movie? Or while driving? Or being driven?

Senior management is expected to justify their investments through tools such as GRPs and CPRPs. While these measures would largely justify the accuracy of your target audience a professional marketer is trained to leave nothing unmeasured.

However, looking at the decision making occasion may have the capacity of changing the way customers feel and perceive about the brand or company. Linking the tone of voice according to the channel used could get a customer excited.

For instance, a customer intending to purchase a mobile device may hear radio adverts, then press releases. He would then find out the functionality on YouTube and search for pros and cons from current users online.

Chances are a tweet or a Facebook comment/question. He would then talk to friends and decide on the purchase. Note the moods and levels of reception on all the above stages.

Alternatively your customer might want to borrow a loan from a bank/ financial institution. What would the better channel be? A formal recipient audience such as LinkedIn or a work at home-leisure seekers Facebook time? Note the impact a formal vs. informal tone of voice could create.

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